

# Cuthbert E Dukes OBE MD MSc FRCS FRCPATH DPH— 1890–1977

Cuthbert Dukes was educated at Caterham School and graduated in Medicine at Edinburgh University in 1914. He served in the RAMC during World War I attached to the Rifle Brigade, and was awarded the OBE for his services. After the war he became demonstrator in Bacteriology at University College, London, and joined the staff of St Mark's Hospital in 1922 as its first Pathologist. It was there that he began his classical studies on the Pathology of Cancer of the Rectum which earned him international recognition. The Dukes classification (1) has provided a sound basis for modern surgical treatment and is used throughout the world as a guide to prognosis.

Among his many other contributions to proctology his pioneer work on Familial Polyposis of the Colon has perhaps been the most outstanding, and the Polyposis Register at St Mark's Hospital is a living memorial to his endeavours. This gave him particular pleasure because the research led to the prevention of cancer among individual sufferers from the disease whom he came to know as friends as well as patients. But Dukes had a very wide field of interest in Pathology which began with the publication of his book on the Bacteriology of Food (1925) and after his appointment to St Peter's Hospital for Genito-Urinary Diseases in 1929 with books on the Examination and Interpretation of the Urine (1939) and Bacteria in Relation to Nursing (1946). His research on cancer of the prostate and bladder still provides the basis for modern classification of these diseases. Absorbed as he was with his hospital work Dukes found time to run a busy private practice and was for a generation the authority on clinical pathology to whom surgeons and physicians in London turned for advice. It was the application of his laboratory work to the care of patients which was the essence of his achievement. He cared deeply for individuals as patients though they were not his own. He was one of the founders of modern clinical pathology and joined the Association of Clinical Pathologists in 1927 a few weeks after its foundation and became its President in 1952.

Dukes was President of the Section of Proctology of the Royal Society of Medicine in 1944, the Section of Urology in 1957 and the Section of the History of Medicine in 1959 and was made an Honorary Fellow of the Society in 1974. He was also very active in the Medical Society of London, as Lettsomian Lecturer, Orator, Editor of the proceedings and President in 1952, in which year he was Hunterian Professor at the Royal College of Surgeons of England. A firm believer in the closest possible co-operation between surgeon and pathologist, he took great pains to encourage surgeons to visit his laboratory and study the pathology of the tumours they treated. This interest and help in surgical work was recognised by the award of an Honorary Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1950.

Cuthbert Dukes had an exceptionally wide range of professional interests. He wrote a biography of Lord Lister (1924), designed an apparatus for drainage of the urinary bladder which was in general use between the two World Wars and took an active interest in patients with colostomies and ileostomies. He carried out studies on the management of colostomy which were the first of their kind and showed that the stoma would work spontaneously and regular washouts were unnecessary.

Dr Dukes was careful to make his research methods and



results as accurate as possible. He also put a tremendous effort into the writing of his papers, drafting and re-drafting until he got the exact words to express his meaning. A pencil and writing pad were always at his bedside should he awake and think of a better alternative to something he had already written.

Dukes will be remembered for his professional achievements but as much for his kindly personality and whimsical sense of humour. As conversationalist and raconteur he was outstanding and those who knew him still recall with gratitude not only his role as a unifying force at times of disagreement but as a friend to whom they could turn for advice. His gentleness was compounded of an inner tranquillity and wisdom which was strongly influenced by his Quaker faith. In his retirement he refused all honours despite the wishes of his former colleagues and lived quietly at home in Wimbledon until his death at the age of 86.

Basil C Morson VRD DM FRCS FRCP FRCPATH

## Reference

- 1 Dukes CE, Bussey HJR. The spread of cancer and its effect upon prognosis. *Brit J Cancer* 1958;12:309–320.